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ABSTRACT

State and local school systems have developed comprehensive drug abuse prevention programs that appear to have little influence on the rising tide of teenage drug abuse. Classroom teachers, as implementors of such programs, frequently veto them or change them considerably. Forty secondary teachers were selected as research subjects to examine this problem. These subjects indicated willingness to develop and implement a drug abuse prevention program. A control group of forty teachers who had similar assignments in their schools, but had voiced no opinion on the program, received the same training in abuse prevention that the research subjects received. After training which concentrated on information and value related sample lessons, the groups were subdivided into lesson groups--teachers who subsequently implemented lessons, and those who did not. Results indicated that teachers' age and experience had little bearing on their implementing drug abuse programs, and knowledge of the subject alone was not enough to insure implementation. It was found that teachers feel that information-oriented programs increase the level of drug use among teenagers. Implementation was more likely with programs in which value-oriented activities were included. (JD)

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WHY DO TEACHERS CHOOSE TO IMPLEMENT OR REJECT DRUG ABUSE PREVENTION PROGRAMS?

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INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades many tax payer dollars at federal, state and local levels have been spent in developing educational programs. For each program the bulk of the funds are spent in development, less is spent evaluating what is developed and even less is spent in studying how the program is implemented in the schools. For many new programs the key question is not how to implement but whether the program will ever be implemented at all. Many programs reach the school only to languish on a shelf or in a closet. The key individual in the implementation process is the average classroom teacher. Why will some teachers implement a new program and other teachers bury it? The educational research community has generally ignored these questions. Their focus has been on more celestial areas. In the absence of any solid research, many educators seem to have created their own explanations of why some programs are used and others fail. It is our contention that over the years, these explantions have become, in reality, a series of 'myths'. We define a myth with Webster's definition - an untested belief. It is these myths which need to be systemically investigated if we are to make progress in implementing each new wave of 'innovation'.

BACKGROUND

We will delimit our investigation to the implementation of drug abuse prevention programs in an urban middle school setting. Many states and local school systems have developed their own comprehensive drug abuse prevention programs. Unfortunately, these programs have had little impact on the rising tide of teenage drug abuse. For all of the seventies, more and more young people of every ethnic group, at every socio-economic level were getting into drugs. The annual survey of high school seniors documented this trend (Johnston, Bachman, O'Malley, 1977). Early in the 70's the schools responded

to this problem by instituting a series of programs which were hastily constructed and implemented. Several critics were quick to discover that the teachers didn't know enough to do the job. (Bard 1975, Penn, Erikson, 1973). To counteract this problem Shain (1974) and Lotecka (1974) both conducted systematic training programs. They were both able to increase the teachers' knowledge about drugs and develop an anti-drug attitude. On the other hand, Wong and Zimmermann (1974) found that teachers' attitudes were unchanged for many drugs after receiving a training program. However, they did find that the trained teachers did view alcohol as a much more dangerous drug. Dorman (1974) not only trained teachers but followed them into their classrooms. He found that the teachers did not impart this knowledge to their students.

Burkett (1976) had similar results with his sample of teachers throughout the state of Washington. He found meager implementation of the state's drug abuse prevention program. Very few teachers used any element of the program. Yarber (1979) found that his sample of Indiana 3rd grade teachers ignored the state anti-drug abuse program.

Why is there so much trouble in implementing programs in this area? It is not just the drug abuse prevention area which suffers from this problem. Stake and Easley (1978) conducted a series of case studies throughout the United States in several academic areas. They were interested in the effect of the NSF curriculum projects on the average classroom. They found that teachers were able to stop the curriculum changes they opposed. The teachers seemed to have a "primary veto power" over implementing new programs. This paper will concentrate on why some teachers use this veto power and others do not.

PROCEDURE

The forty teachers used in this sample were selected from a sample of over four hundred applicants. Teachers were selected on the basis of several criteria. One of these criteria was their willingness to join in a team of teachers to develop and implement a drug-abuse prevention program. Each team was asked to secure a team of control teachers who had similar assignments in their school. The control teachers numbered forty and were given all pre and post tests. The tests used in this study consisted of the Psychological Screening Inventory (PSI), a questionnaire, an eight part Semantic Differential test and an 85 item subject matter test. The PSI was given only as a pretest but all the other instruments were administered as pre and post tests. The treatment was an intensive 60 hour training program which concentrated on information for the first 30 hours and value related sample lessons for the other 30 hours.

RESULTS

All forty teachers completed the 60 hour program and earned six graduate credits. For the control group, 38 of the original teachers completed all the post tests. Both groups were subdivided on the basis of information obtained on the post test questionnaire. The questionnaire asked the teachers to specify the lessons they had implemented in each of the target areas. With this information, we were able to subdivide both experimental and control groups into the lesson groups - those that implemented lessons in the target areas and the no lessons group - those that did not utilize any lessons during the academic year in these areas. The lesson experimental group did implement 500 lessons during the training sessions and reached 1,710 students. The objective of the institute was to reach 1,350 students and this objective was realized. However, the basic question remains why didn't a sizable group of trained teachers implement lessons in the target areas. The answer to this question is much more complex than we expected. We will analyze each of the variables we investigated. In each of these areas one or more myths

seem to have been accepted by many educators. We will examine the accuracy of these generalizations or speculations. Age Myth: Younger teachers are more likely to implement newer programs. This is particularly true in the area of drugs because they are closer to the drug scene. Our findings do not support this myth. The experimental lesson group was 2 years younger than the no-lesson group but in the control group just the opposite was true. In both lesson groups there were teachers in their 50's who energetically implemented lessons in this area. Experience Myth: More experienced teachers will be more likely to implement new programs. Our findings do not support this idea. The experimental groups had similar levels of experience. The control-lesson group did have one more year of experience but this difference was not substantial enough to be significantly different. Knowledge Myth: Teachers must be taught new material before they will implement it. This is the idea behind much of the inservice teacher training. Our findings do not support this generalization. On the pretests, both the experimental and control groups had similar levels of knowledge. By the time the post tests were given, both experimental groups had significantly higher levels of knowledge than the control groups. The teachers in the lesson experimental group transmitted their information to their students while the no-lesson experimental group did not. Apparently, knowledge alone isn't enough to assure implementation. The no-lesson experimental group certainly had all the knowledge they needed to implement any program in this area. They knew more than the control teachers who did, in fact, implement lessons in the target areas. It is interesting to note that these teachers, despite a lack of training, had substantial knowledge gains on the post test. They simply learned the subject matter on their own. By the end of the treatment they were significantly ahead of the no lesson control group. We were also interested in the teachers' perception of how much they knew in the target areas. On both pre and post test questionnaires we asked all groups to rate their level of knowledge in each topic. The pretest results

showed the lesson-control group to rate their self knowledge the highest at the start of the experiment. After receiving training, both experimental groups rated their knowledge higher than the control groups. The highest self rating of knowledge score was recorded for the lesson-experimental group. Teams Myth: Teams of teachers have a much better chance of implementing new programs. This generalization has been incorporated into the guidelines of the NSF and U. S. Education Department pre college teacher training grants. Our findings are mixed in supporting this idea. Initially, (in May), we did select participants on the basis of teams (2-3 teachers per school). However, by the following September when our institute began, some of our teachers had changed jobs or been assigned to other schools in the same district. Within the New York City sample, several teachers were assigned to other schools in the system. To rectify this problem, we assembled our 40 teachers into 13 teams. We combined public school personnel in schools close together geographically. Similarly, we combined isolated private school teachers with teachers from neighboring private schools. We ended up with 4 private school teams and 9 public school teams.

Only four of the 13 teams had all their members implement lessons. For three teams, some members implemented lessons but some did not. Surprisingly, six of the isolated teachers implemented lessons in their schools. They didn't have any other teachers in their school using the lessons but they went ahead anyway. A few of these teachers were planning to get more teachers in their schools involved this year.

The no lesson experimental group also included four teams where not a single member implemented any lessons. There were five isolated teachers in this group who did not carry lessons back to their schools. Our most puzzling question is why would some members of a team implement and others would not? Unfortunately, we have too few teams to analyze this problem in any definitive way. The latest federal guidelines specify the inclusion of administrative personnel in any teams.

Perhaps such teams would have more of a commitment to implement. Only future research will answer this question. State-District School Program Myth: Teachers can't develop their own programs in new areas. They will do better if they implement lessons within an existing school or state program. Our findings do not support his idea. All of the schools engaged in this program had existing drug-abuse prevention programs in their schools. The teachers had very little or no inservice training on how to implement their program and they responded before training with minimal compliance. Some of these schools had information-orientated programs, some had value activities as well. Regardless of the type of program, the teachers implemented many of the lessons they had learned in the institute regardless of whether or not they fit into the existing school programs. They simply used lessons they felt confident would work with their students. During the training course we spent four hours on the N. Y. State prevention program, gave each teacher the state booklets and did sample lessons. The teachers did not accept this program to any great extent. Instead they seemed to be very eclectic in selecting lessons from a number of different programs or sources. The critical item seemed to be whether a lesson would work well. Evaluations by fellow teachers in the institute seemed to be more of a factor in determining how useful a lesson would be. The implementing teachers actually created their own prevention programs by selecting lessons in a number of different areas. These programs were not as well organized as the state or district programs, but were more practical.

Opportunity To Teach Myth: Teachers must have the opportunity to implement lessons in the target area. They must have few restrictions if they are to implement lessons in any given area. Our findings do not support this idea. We based our answer on an analysis of the data from the questionnaires. We asked the teachers to indicate if they had no restrictions (3 Points) some restrictions (2 Points) or absolute restrictions (1 Point) for each topic in the target areas. On the basis of the pretest data both no-lesson groups (experimental, control) cited an

abundance of restrictions while both lesson groups (experimental, control) had mean values which were in the 'some' restriction range. On the basis of the post tests both no-lesson groups had even lower restriction scores, while the lesson groups both reported minimal restrictions. The reader need only recall that many of these teachers in the lesson or no-lesson groups came from the same schools. Why would one teacher in the same school or district note restrictions while another would report only limited restrictions? After some checking with the administrative personnel in these schools, we concluded that the "restrictions" cited by the teachers were largely self-imposed and not handed down by the school or district. In most cases the 'restrictions' were only in the minds of the teachers. As an example, some of these restrictions could have developed from an assignment we gave to all the teachers in the experimental group. We required them to analyze the evaluation studies (Aubrey 1971, Clements 1978, Matthews 1975, Robinson 1975, Stuart 1974, Ryan 1976) of various drug-abuse prevention programs all around the country.

This research shows that information-oriented programs actually increase the level of drug abuse with students. After realizing the consequences of implementing information-alone lessons, some of the teachers decided not to use lessons in these areas. This was true especially in schools where information-oriented programs were being used. The trained teachers realized the possible adverse effects of such programs and terminated efforts to implement. For those schools that had value-oriented activities mixed in with the information, implementation was more certain. After much thinking about this finding, we have come to the conclusion that some teachers seem to use the restriction idea as a rationalization not to implement. This is our partial explanation of the elimination of lessons by the teachers in the experimental group. On the pretest, the no-lesson experimental group used 7.7 lessons/teacher. By the post test none of these teachers implemented any lessons in the target areas. Perhaps they perceived

it sensible to discontinue lessons which might have an adverse effect on their students. Willingness Myth: Teachers must be willing to teach the material to be implemented. This generalization was supported. This data was determined by asking the teachers to rate their willingness to teach each topic in the target area on a three point scale. A three point value meant the teachers were looking forward to teaching the topic, a two point score was given if they were willing and a one point score was assigned if they were unwilling to teach each of the topics listed. On the pretest data, the two experimental groups had mean values within the willingness range. For the control group, the no-lesson group had a mean value in the unwillingness range. On the post test, both experimental and control lesson groups had means in the willingness range while both no lesson groups had mean values in the unwillingness range.

CONCLUSIONS:

We defined a myth as an untested belief. It is unfortunate that so many different aspects of education are untested. Brophy and Evertson (1976) with their research on teacher behavior explored many of the myths surrounding effective teaching. The same systematic approach should be applied to the in-service training of teachers and to the implementation of new curriculae. Hopefully, this study simply points the direction for many other studies in this area. It is our hope that other researchers use the NSF and Department of Education Institutes to explore the myths surrounding implementation. It is only in this way that education can be founded on a more empirical base.

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